

Paṭhama Jhāna Pañha Sutta

The Discourse on the Question of the First Dhyana

Also called (Savitakka) Paṭhama Jhāna Sutta = On the First Dhyana (with Initial Application)

[How to progress in the first dhyana]

(Saṃyutta Nikāya 40.1/4:262 f)

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1 Moggallāna's struggle

1.1 THE NINE DISCOURSES. While Sāriputta's awakening is described in **the Anupada Sutta** (M 111),¹ Moggallāna's awakening is recorded in the first nine discourses of **the Moggallāna Saṃyutta** (the collected sayings on Moggallāna) of the Saṃyutta Nikāya. These nine discourses recount Moggallāna's meditative experiences during the week-long effort to attain arhathood immediately after he has become a monk. On each of the nine occasions, the Buddha, using his psychic power, would appear to him to instruct him in his meditation. The nine suttas of **the Moggallāna Saṃyutta** (S 40.1-9) dealing with his meditations are as follows:

(1) Paṭhama Jhāna Pañha Sutta Also called (Savitakka) Paṭhama Jhāna Sutta	S 40.1/4:262 f	SD 24.11
(2) Dutiya Jhāna Pañha Sutta Also called (Avitakka) Dutiya Jhāna Sutta	S 40.2/4:263 f	SD 24.12a
(3) Tatiya Jhāna Pañha Sutta Also called (Sukhena) Tatiya Jhāna Sutta	S 40.3/4:264 f	SD 24.13
(4) Catuttha Jhāna Pañha Sutta Also called (Upekkhaka) Catuttha Jhāna Sutta	S 40.4/4:265 f	SD 24.14
(5) Ākāsañāṇc'āyatana Pañha Sutta	S 40.5/4:266	SD 24.15
(6) Viññāṇāṇc'āyatana Pañha Sutta	S 40.6/4:266 f	SD 24.16
(7) Ākiñcaññ'āyatana Pañha Sutta	S 40.7/4:267 f	SD 24.17
(8) N'eva,saññā,nāsaññ'āyatana Pañha Sutta	S 40.8/4:268	SD 24.18
(9) Animitta Ceto,samādhi Pañha Sutta	S 40.9/4:268 f	SD 24.19

Another account (a more compact one) of Moggallāna's struggle for arhathood is found in **the Pacalā Sutta** (A 7.58).²

1.2 WHY MOGGALLĀNA'S QUEST TOOK ONLY 1 WEEK. In **the Sāriputta Moggallāna Sutta 1** (A 4.167), Moggallāna states that he attains arhathood through quick realization (*hippābhiññā*), that is, *in only a week*, but his progress is difficult (*dukkha,paṭipadā*). However, with the Buddha's help, he quickly gains direct knowledge.³ In **the Sāriputta Moggallāna Sutta 2** (A 4.168), Sāriputta declares that he too attains arhathood through quick realization, which takes *two weeks*, but his progress is easy (*sukha,paṭipadā*).⁴

Moggallāna reaches the spiritual goal more quickly than Sāriputta because the Buddha admonishes him at each of the nine stages of his attainments [1.1] and also because he has a smaller range of direct knowledge to comprehend. Sāriputta, however, is superior to him in wisdom, covering a more comprehensive range of direct knowledge, and so takes twice the time. In a sense, Sāriputta, too, is admonished

¹ M 111/3:25-29 = SD 56.4.

² A 7.58/4:85-91 = SD 4.11. See also "Mahāmoggallāna: Master of psychic powers," in Nyanaponika & H Hecker, *Great Disciples of the Buddha*, 1997: 78-83.

³ A 4.167/2:154 f = SD 46.16.

⁴ A 4.168/2:155 = SD 46.17.

by the Buddha, as interestingly he is a by-stander, fanning the Buddha, while he teaches his nephew Dīgha,nakha on feelings.⁵

According to **the Cīvāra Sutta** (S 16.11), Mahā Kassapa, after his meeting with the Buddha, goes into a seven-day solitary retreat, and on the eighth day becomes an arhat. He meditates on his own without any help from the Buddha, and immediately after his full awakening, the Buddha visits him, and they exchange their outer robes.⁶ The Commentary explains that the Buddha, by this gesture, encourages Mahā Kassapa *to live as a forest monk* as an inspiration for future monastic practitioners.⁷

1.3 WHY THE BUDDHA’S QUEST TOOK SIX YEARS. From the ancient texts,⁸ we know that the Buddha himself, as a Bodhisattva, spends some time (probably less than a year altogether) under Ālāra Kālāma and under Uddaka Rāma,putta, mastering everything they have to teach, but not finding liberation, he practises various forms of self-mortification for six years.⁹

In all, the Buddha takes some six years to find the path to awakening! The reason for this is that he is unable to find any awakened teacher who could teach him the True Dharma, and as such he has work at his own self-awakening. How does he do this? First, he recalls his attainment of the first dhyana under the jambu tree during the ploughing festival when he was only seven, reflecting on its bliss, and that he has nothing to fear of pleasure that is wholesome.¹⁰

Indeed, it is on account of the Bodhisattva’s ability of attaining dhyana at such a young age—his spiritual precociousness—that he easily masters the methods of the two teachers, Ālāra and Rāma (father of Uddaka). For, the Bodhisattva is said to have attained the sphere of nothingness (*ākāṅkamaññ’āyatana*) under Ālāra, and the sphere of neither-perception-nor-non-perception using Rāma’s teachings (transmitted through his son, Uddaka Rāma,putta).¹¹

So, then, turning to *breath meditation*, the Bodhisattva quickly attains deep mental focus and, letting go of all mental hindrances, he gains the fourth dhyana. Emerging from that state, he directs his mind to attain the knowledge of the recollection of his own past lives (*pubbe,nivāsānussati,nāṇa*) during the first watch (10.00-2.00 am) of Vesak Day.

Using this rebirth knowledge, the Buddha recalls his most spiritually significant past life, as confirmed by **the Ghaṭikāra Sutta** (M 81), that is, as *the monk Joti,pāla under the immediate past Buddha, Kassapa*,¹² under whom he has learned the Dharma, especially the teachings on rebirth, karma and not-self.

⁵ **Dīgha,nakha S** (M 74.14/1:500 f) = SD 16.1; also MA 3:203.

⁶ S 16.11/2:217-222 = SD 47.16.

⁷ This simple gesture of great spiritual significance was later used by Chan masters in China to legitimize their lineage: Mahā Kāśyapa’s “robe” was used as a token or totem that is handed down to a legitimate Chan heir so that the lineage is preserved. See **How Buddhism Became Chinese** = SD 40b (5.2.2.2).

⁸ Eg **Ariya,pariyesanā S** (M 26.15-18/1:163-167) = SD 1.11 (details of the 2 teachers); **Mahā Sīha,nāda S** (M 12.44-61/1:77-82) = SD 1.13 (details of self-mortification); **Mahā Saccaka S** (M 36.20-31-44/1:242-249) = SD 1.12 (self-mortification); **Bhaya,bherava S** (M 4/1:16-24) = SD 44.2 (overcoming fear in solitary practice).

⁹ This estimation is based on the Buddha’s remark to Subhadda, his last convert, recorded in **Mahā,parinibbāna S** (D 16): “I was *twenty-nine years of age*, Subhadda, | When I went forth, seeking for the good. | Now *fifty years have passed* | Since the day I went forth...” (D 16.5.27/2:151) = SD 9. Earlier on, the Buddha declares: “Ānanda, I am now old, worn out, burdened with years, my journey done, I have reached the sum of my days, I am turning *eighty*.” (D 16.2.25b/2:100) = SD 9. According to **Apadāna** & Comys, in Kassapa Buddha’s time, Jotipāla was at first unimpressed with him, calling him a “shaveling ascetic,” a remark that led to his last birth as Gotama’s having to practise austerities for a longer period than did the other Buddhas (Ap 1:301; UA 265; ApA 114 f). See AK Warder, *Indian Buddhism*, 1970: 44. For a detailed text-critical study of the Buddha’s quest for awakening, see Hajime Nakamura, *Gotama Buddha*, 2000: 126-197.

¹⁰ M 36.21-32/1:236 f = SD 1:12.

¹¹ M 26.15-17/1:163-167 = SD 1.11. Brahmavamso, however, is of the opinion that what these two teachers taught were *not* dhyana: see **Ariya,pariyesanā S** (M 26) = SD 1.11 Intro (4.1) & **The Buddha Discovered Dhyana** = SD 33.1.

¹² M 81.6/2:46 & 81.23/2:54 = SD 49.3. The **Buddha,vam̐sa** records our Buddha as recalling as the monk Jotipāla under the Buddha Kassapa, he “illuminated the Conqueror’s teaching” (*sobhayaṃ Jina,sāsanaṃ*, B 25.15)

Then the Buddha attains the knowledge of death and rebirth (*cutūpapāta,ñāṇa*) or the “divine eye,” with which he is able to see how beings fare through many lives according to their karma.

Recalling his own past lives and those of other beings, he sees a common pattern of *how the three unwholesome roots of greed, hate and delusion, condition our sufferings*, and how through understanding and accepting *the universal characteristics of impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and not-self*, suffering is overcome and liberation won.

Recalling the teachings he has received from Kassapa Buddha, which are confirmed through his own understanding, he finally is able to directly see into true reality, and so wins the knowledge of the destruction of the influxes (*āsava-k,khaya,ñāṇa*), that is, the floods of sense-desires, views, existence and ignorance. With this, he attains self-awakening and spiritual liberation.¹³ In other words, while it is dhyana that blissfully calms and clears the Bodhisattva’s mind, it is the True Dharma (*saddhamma*) that makes him Buddha.¹⁴

2 Liberated both ways

Like Sāriputta, Moggallāna is an arhat “**liberated both ways**” (*ubhato,bhāga,vimutta*). All arhats are perfectly liberated in the same way from ignorance and suffering, but are distinguished into two types on the basis of their proficiency in concentration. Those who can attain the eight liberations (*aṭṭha,vimokkha*),¹⁵ which include the four formless attainments and the attainment of cessation, are called “*liberated both ways*,” that is, liberated *from the physical body* by means of the formless dhyana, and from all defilements by the path of arhathood.

Those who have destroyed the defilements but lack mastery over the eight liberations are called “**liberated by wisdom**” (*paññā,vimutta*). The differences between the two types of liberation are given in **the Mahā,nidāna Sutta** (D 15)¹⁶ and **the Kīṭāgiri Sutta** (M 70).¹⁷ As recorded in the nine suttas above [1], Moggallāna, within the same week of striving, not only masters the nine successive meditative states but also wins the “paths of spiritual power” (*iddhi,pāda*), and thus gains higher knowledge (*abhiññā*), that is, the three knowledges [1.3].

3 Sutta structure

All the nine suttas describing Moggallāna’s meditation follow a standard of theory (*pariyatti*), practice (*paṭipatti*) and realization (*paṭivedha*).¹⁸ For example, in the Paṭhama Jhāna Pañha Sutta, Moggallāna first defines the first dhyana [§3], practises to attain it but fails [§4-5], and on the Buddha’s advice, he attains that state [§§6-7]. In all the nine suttas describing Moggallāna’s meditation [1], he has to resolve a key factor of that particular level, thus:

¹³ The 3 knowledges (*te,vijjā*) are listed at **M** 2.10/1:8, **9.70/1:55**; **D** 33.1.10.58/3:220, **34.1.4.10/3:275**; **A** 3.59/-1:166 f, 3.67/1:197-199, **6.63/3:414**, **10.102/5:211**; see also **Te,vijja S** (D 13) = SD 1.8 Intro (2.2). For a list of 6 direct knowledges & defs, see **Sāmañña,phala S** (D 2.89-100/1:77-100) = SD 8.10.

¹⁴ On the Buddha’s respect for the Dharma, see **Gārava S** (S 6.2/1:138-140) = SD 12.3.

¹⁵ Briefly, the 8 liberations are: (1) the liberation of one with physical form sees physical forms (*rūpī rūpāni passati*); (2) that of one who does not see physical form internally, but sees physical forms externally (*ajjhataṃ arūpa,saññī bahiddhā rūpāni passati*); (3) that of one liberated after contemplating the idea of the beautiful (*subhan’ t’eva adhimutto hoti*); (4) that of in the sphere of the infinity of space; (5) that of the sphere of the infinity of consciousness; (6) that of the sphere of nothingness; (7) that of the sphere of neither-perception-nor-non-perception; (8) that of the cessation of perception and feeling (Pm 2:38-40). Comy on **Mahā Sakuludāyi S** (M 77.22/2:13) says that these liberations are the mind’s full (but temporary) release from the opposing states and its full (but temporary) release by delighting in the object (*ārammaṇa*) (MA 3:255, cf 255-259). For details, see **Mahā,parinibbāna S** (D 16.3.33/2:111 f) = SD 9 & n & **Mahā,nidāna S** (D 15.35/2:70 f) & Intro (10).

¹⁶ D 15.35-26/2:70 f = SD 5.17.

¹⁷ M 70.15-16/1:477 f & SD 11.1 Intro (5.2)

¹⁸ On the three levels of training, see **The levels of training** = SD 40a.4 esp (2).

The meditative state

- (1) The first dhyana
- (2) The second dhyana
- (3) The third dhyana
- (4) The fourth dhyana
- (5) The sphere of infinite space
- (6) The sphere of infinite consciousness
- (7) The sphere of nothingness
- (8) The sphere of neither-perception-nor-non-perception
- (9) The signless concentration of mind

The factor needed to be resolved (let go of)

- sensuality (*kāma*),
 initial application & thinking (*vitakka*),
 zest (*pīti*),
 happiness (*sukha*),
 form (*rūpa*),
 the sphere of infinite space (*ākāsānañcāyatana*),
 the sphere of infinite consciousness (*viññānañcāyatana*),
 the sphere of nothingness (*ākīñcaññāyatana*),
 the signs (*nimitta*).

At every moment when Moggallāna is caught lingering too long with a certain distraction (while attempting to attain the first dhyana) or a factor of that state (as in the other eight states), the Buddha reminds him to “steady...unify...concentrate your mind” (*cittam saṅghapehi, cittam ekodim karohi, cittam samādaha*) in that particular state, that is, let go of the distraction. To attain the first dhyana, we must totally let go of “perception and attention accompanied by sensuality” (*kāma, saḥagatā saññā, manasikārā*), and in the other eight levels, we have to let go of the key factor of the preceding state in order to progress.

Each sutta closes with a statement on spiritual friendship [§8].¹⁹

4 Dhyana and dhyana-factors

4.1 DHYANA PERICOPES. A dhyana (*jhāna*) is a deep meditative state when all *the five mental hindrances* are overcome. The mind goes on to become progressively more still and profoundly more blissful. Emerging from such mental stillness, the mind is so clear that it can be used to attain direct knowledge of true reality. The still mind goes through *four stages of dhyana*. The pericopes in the early Buddhist texts, describe **the dhyanas** as follows:

- (1) “Quite secluded from sensual pleasures, secluded from unwholesome mental states, he attains and dwells in the **first dhyana**, accompanied by initial application (*vitakka*) and sustained application (*vicāra*), accompanied by zest (*pīti*) and happiness (*sukha*), *born of solitude* (*viveka, -ja*).” [§4]
- (2) “With the stilling of applied application and sustained application, by gaining inner tranquillity and oneness of mind, he attains and dwells in **the second dhyana**, free from applied application and sustained application, accompanied by zest and happiness *born of concentration* (*samādhi, ja*).” (S 40.2.4/4:264) = SD 24.12
- (3) “With the fading away of zest, he remains equanimous, mindful and clearly knowing, and experiences happiness with the body. He attains and dwells in **the third dhyana**, of which the noble ones declare, ‘Happily he dwells in equanimity and mindfulness.’” (S 40.3.4/4:264) = SD 24.13
- (4) “With the abandoning of pleasure and pain—and with the earlier disappearance of happiness and displeasure—he attains and dwells in **the fourth dhyana**, that is neither painful nor pleasant, and with mindfulness fully purified by equanimity.” (S 40.4.4/4:265) = SD 24.14

The fourth form dhyana is also the base or starting point (*pādaka-jjhāna*) for the attaining of superknowledge (*abhiññā*).²⁰

¹⁹ Another famous case of spiritual friendship (in connection with meditation) is that described in **Meghiya S** (A 9.3/4:354-358 ≈ U 4.1/34-37) = SD 34.2.

²⁰ See eg **Sāmañña, phala S** (D 2.89-100/1:78-85) = SD 8.10.

4.2 SEQUENCE OF ATTAINMENT. The **Pabbateyya Gāvī Sutta** (A 9.35) is a very important discourse in terms of giving practical instructions in the proper cultivation of each dhyana before proceeding onto the next.²¹ **Buddhaghosa** quotes this first part of the Sutta, admonishing that the meditator should not try to review the dhyana too much when it is first attained. The state must first be sufficiently cultivated and stabilized before going on into another.²²

In fact, all the dhyanas—the four form dhyanas and the four attainments—are contiguously linked, so that each time we have to begin with the first dhyana, and progressively attain to and through the following stages. It is like a four-roomed house with only one entrance. Going through that door, we enter the first room. We must go through the first room to enter the second room, go through the second room to enter the third room, and we must go through the third room to enter the fourth room. In the same way, when exiting, we have to pass through each of the rooms in reverse.²³

4.3 DHYANA-FACTORS. For these form-dhyanas (as they are called), we can tabulate the respective dhyana-factors (*jhān'aṅga*) as follows:

	<u>initial</u> <u>application</u>	<u>sustained</u> <u>application</u>	<u>zest</u>	<u>happiness</u>	<u>one-pointedness</u> <u>of mind</u>
1 st dhyana	<i>vitakka</i>	<i>vicāra</i>	<i>pīti</i>	<i>sukha</i>	("ek'aggatā")
2 nd dhyana	...	...	<i>pīti</i>	<i>sukha</i>	<i>ek'aggatā</i>
3 rd dhyana	...	...	...	<i>sukha</i>	<i>ek'aggatā</i>
4 th dhyana	...	...	...	...	<i>ek'aggatā</i>

From this table, we can see that the dhyanas progress from one level to the next by way of “factor-reduction,” except for the first dhyana, where *two* dhyana factors are abandoned to become the second dhyana. In the fourth dhyana, only one dhyana-factor, namely, one-pointedness, remains.

As regards the first dhyana, it is important to note that the Sutta formula does *not* mention “one-pointedness of the mind” (*cittassa ekaggatā*) or “concentration” (*samādhi*). **Buddhaghosa**, however, argues that it should be a part of the first dhyana *simply because the Vibhaṅga says so* (Vism 147). The reason that one-pointedness of the mind is *not mentioned* in the canonical formula is because of the presence of “initial application and sustained application” (*vitakka, vicāra*), or “thinking and pondering,” a kind of subdued mental chatter and investigating (or gentle exploring)—which prevent any real mental concentration.²⁴ Only the Abhidhamma Piṭaka and later works like the Abhidhammattha,saṅgaha, and the Sanskrit works, Abhidharma,samuccaya and Abhidharma,kośa regard “one-pointedness of mind” as a factor of the first dhyana, but there is no evidence whatsoever in the Pali Canon to support this view.²⁵

It is useful to note that these various sets of dhyana-factors mentioned are not the only mental phenomena present in the dhyanas. In **the Anupada Sutta** (M 111), for example, Sāriputta gives the following additional concomitants: contact, feeling, perception, volition, consciousness, desire, decision, energy, mindfulness, equanimity and attention.²⁶ The Abhidhamma gives even longer lists of concomitants. **The Dhamma,saṅgaṇī**, for example, lists about 60 mental states for the first dhyana. The **Abhidhammattha,saṅgaha**, however, narrows the list down to a set of 33 distinct concomitants (Abhs: BRS 2.2-5/76-88).

²¹ A 9.35/4:418-411 = SD 24.3.

²² Vism 4.130-132/153 f.

²³ See *Bhāvanā* = SD 15.1 (8.6).

²⁴ Asaṅga in his **Abhidharma,samuccaya**, says that both applied and sustained applications are “mental babble” (*mano,jalpa*): while applied application is “mental babble that seeks” (*paryeṣaka mano,jalpa*), sustained application is “mental babble that reviews” (*pratyavekṣaka mano,jalpa*) (Abhds 10). Cf **Visuddhi,magga**: The first dhyana is disturbed by applied application and sustained application, like water disturbed by ripples and wavelets (Vism 4.144/156 f). See Rahula 1978:103 f.

²⁵ See **Dhyana** = SD 8.4 (5).

²⁶ M 111.4-11/3:25-27. *Phasso vedanā saññā cetanā cittaṃ chando adhimokkha viriyāṃ sati upekkhā manasikaro.*

However, only the five mentioned in the above table are the dhyana-factors of the first dhyana because “when these have arisen, dhyana is said to have arisen” (Vism 4.107/152).²⁷

4.4 CULTIVATING AND MASTERING THE DHYANAS. The meditator wishing to master the first dhyana must do this in two important steps: (1) mastering the meditation sign (*nimitta*); and (2) gain the five kinds of mastery (*pañca vasī*). Let us examine them briefly.

4.4.1 Cultivating the meditation sign (*nimitta, vaddhana*). The meditation sign (*nimitta*) is the reflexive or mental image that arises when our meditation is sustained in proper focus.²⁸ The more joy we put into our meditation, the more easily the *nimitta* arises and stabilizes.²⁹ The *nimitta* or radiant and blissful mental sign is merely a reflection of our own mind. If we have constantly been keeping our precepts³⁰ well, the mind quickly clears up, and the *nimitta* easily radiates. We must also let go of the “doer” or “inner controller.”³¹ In other words, we cannot make the *nimitta* happen, but it will arise in its own time. We can only prepare for it in stillness, and welcome it with growing stillness. The *nimitta* will then grow of itself.

As the radiance grows, we must be careful to avoid looking at its fringes. For, we may notice that it is not so bright there, and become critical of various other faults, so that we are lost in thought and so lose the radiance. The best way to stabilize the *nimitta* is to keep the mind calmly focussed at its *centre*, and enjoy the bliss. At any point, if we face any difficulty, simply go back to the stillness of the breath, to regain some calm energy.³²

4.4.2 The five kinds of mastery (*pañca vasī*). Seasoned meditation masters often advise the beginner, on attaining dhyana, to keep it up for a sustained period, and not to spend too much time discerning them.³³ This “stoking” of the dhyanas is kept up until one gains mastery (*vasī, bhāva*) over them. In this connection, the Commentaries and later meditation literature speak of these **fivefold mastery** (*pañca vasī*):³⁴

- (1) Mastering the advertence (*āvajjana, vasī*): the ability to bring our mind to dhyana;
- (2) Mastering the attainment (*sampājjana, vasī*): entering dhyana quickly and whenever we wish to;
- (3) Mastering the resolution (*adhiṭṭhāna, vasī*): staying in dhyana for as long as we have determined to;
- (4) Mastering the emergence (*vuṭṭhāna, vasī*): easily emerging from dhyana at the appointed time;
- (5) Mastering the review (*paccavekkhaṇa, vasī*): discerning the dhyana factors after emerging from it.

Mastering the advertence means that we are capable of directing the attention to the dhyana-factors, so that they all arise and stay together in due course. Mastering the attainment means we are able at will to get into dhyana and stay there for a certain duration. Mastering the resolution means that we are able to remain in dhyana for the duration we have pre-determined, and conversely, mastering the emergence means that we can emerge from it without any difficulty. Mastering the review means we, on emerging from dhyana, are able to examine immediately all its dhyana-factors so that in due course, we are ready to proceed to the next level.³⁵

²⁷ For details, see **Dhyana** = SD 8.4; see also Gunaratana, *The Path of Serenity and Insight*, 1985: 69 f.

²⁸ See **Nimitta** = SD 19.7.

²⁹ See Ajahn Brahm, *Mindfulness, Bliss and Beyond*, 2006: 96-99.

³⁰ On the precepts, see **Sāleyyaka S** (M 41/1:285-290) = SD 5.7.

³¹ See **Bhāvanā** = SD 15.1 (8.5; 14); **Nimitta** = SD 19.7 (4.2); also Ajahn Brahm, *Mindfulness, Bliss and Beyond*, 2006: 40.

³² See Ajahn Brahm, *Mindfulness, Bliss and Beyond*, 2006: 144 f.

³³ See eg Pa Auk Sayadaw, *Knowing and Seeing*, 1999:18, 2003:55.

³⁴ Pm 96 f; Vism 4.131 f/154, 6.24-30/124 f; ApA 108; Abhs:BRS 342; VismT:Be 1:312. See Gunaratana, *The Path of Serenity and Insight*, 1985:74-77; Pa-Auk, *Knowing and Seeing*, 2003:55-58.

³⁵ See **Bhāvanā** = SD 15.1 (8.6).

5 The formless attainments

In the four Nikayas, the four formless dhyanas are simply called “attainments” (*samāpatti*),³⁶ the “formless states” (*ārūpa*),³⁷ or “spheres” (*āyatana*),³⁸ but in the Commentaries and later literature, they are called the “formless spheres” (*arūp’āyatana*),³⁹ “formless-sphere dhyanas” (*arūpa-jjhāna* or *arūpāvacara-jjhāna*),⁴⁰ or “formless attainments” (*arūpa,samāpatti*).⁴¹ The sutta pericope for the first formless attainment runs as follows:

(5) “By completely transcending the perceptions of form (*rūpa,saññā*), with the disappearance the perceptions of sense-reaction [sense-impingement] (*patigha,saññā*), with non-attention to perceptions of diversity (*ñānatta,saññā*), aware that ‘Space is infinite,’ he attains and dwells in **the sphere of infinite space.**” (S 40.5.4/4:265) = SD 24.15

Here, by “perceptions of form” are meant the sphere of form dhyana, as well as those objects themselves. (Vism 10.13/328).

By “perceptions of sense-reactions” are meant those perceptions that have arisen due to the impact of sense-organs (eye, etc) and the sense-objects (visible objects, etc). They are a name for the perception of visible objects, as it is said: “What are here the perceptions of sense-reactions? They are the perceptions of visible objects, sounds, etc” (Vbh 261). Surely, they no longer exist even for one who has entered the first dhyana, etc, for at such a time the five-sense consciousness is no longer functioning. Nevertheless, this is to be understood as having been said in praise of this formless dhyana, in order to spur us on to strive for it. (Vism 10.16/329).

By “perceptions of diversity” are meant the perceptions arising in the mind (Vbh 261 f). According to the Visuddhi,magga, this refers to the various perceptions outside the dhyanas (Vism 10.20/330).

The pericopes for the remaining four formless attainments are as follows:

(6) “By completely transcending the sphere of infinite space, aware that ‘Consciousness is infinite,’ he attains and dwells in **the sphere of infinite consciousness.**” (S 40.6.4/4:266) = SD 24.16

(7) “By completely transcending the sphere of infinite consciousness, aware that ‘There is nothing,’ he attains and dwells in **the sphere of nothingness.**” (S 40.7.4/4:267) = SD 24.17

(8) “By completely transcending the sphere of nothingness, he enters and dwells in **the sphere of neither-perception-nor-non-perception.**” (S 40.8.4/4:268) = SD 24.18

(9) “By non-attention to all signs, he enters and dwells in **the signless concentration of mind.**” (S 40.9.4/4:269) = SD 24.19

The four formless-dhyana spheres (5-8), properly speaking, are simply aspects or modalities of the fourth dhyana, as they possess the same two dhyana-factors, namely, *one-pointedness and neither-painful-nor-pleasant feeling* (Dhs 68). **Buddhaghosa** compares the four formless attainments to *a four-storey palace, with all the floors looking identical*. However, the objects of sense-pleasure at each successive floor are progressively better. Or, they are like *four pieces of cloth of identical size*, but the first is of thick cloth, the next of thin cloth, the one after the thinner cloth, and the last of the thinnest fabric. The dhyana-factors of equanimity and one-pointedness are constantly present, but become more refined at each higher level.⁴²

The Abhidhamma generally gives *a fivefold model* of the form dhyanas instead of the canonical four-fold model: the 2nd dhyana still has the dhyana-factor of “applied application” (but without “sustained application”), while the 3rd, 4th and 5th correspond to the 2nd, 3rd and 4th, respectively, of the fourfold divi-

³⁶ D 3:212; M 3:207; A 1:94, 4:241, 5:156, 158, 160, 162.

³⁷ M 1:33; It 61; Kvu 325; otherwise not so common in the four Nikāyas.

³⁸ Or, more generally, as “mind-bases” (see BDict: āyatana). See D 2:69-71; M 2:262-264; A 4:426.

³⁹ A commentarial term: DA 3:785; MA 1:28; DhkA 131.

⁴⁰ DA 1:219; UA 185; SnA 2:553; ThaA 2:184.

⁴¹ DA 2:387, 3:804; MA 4:161; SA 3:127; UA 369.

⁴² See Gunaratana, *The Path of Serenity and Insight*, 1985: 119-122.

sion [4].⁴³ This fivefold division is based on such discourses as **the Asaṅkhata Sutta** (S 43.12)⁴⁴ and **the Saṅkhitta Dhamma Sutta** (A 8.63),⁴⁵ which distinguish a “concentration of merely sustained application without applied application” (*avitakka vicāra, matta samādhi*).⁴⁶ This latter probably corresponds to the “intermediate dhyana” (*dhyānāntara*) of the Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma.⁴⁷

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The Discourse on the Question of the First Dhyana

(S 40.1/4:262 f)

- 1 At one time, the venerable Mahā Moggallāna was dwelling in Anātha, piṇḍika’s Park in Jeta, vana.
 2 [263] There, the venerable Mahā Moggallāna addressed the monks thus:
 “Avuso, bhikkhus [Brother monks]!”
 “Avuso!” the monks replied the venerable Mahā Moggallāna in assent.

Theory

- 3 The venerable Mahā Moggallāna said this:
 “Here, avuso, during solitary retreat, this thought arose in my mind, thus:⁴⁸
 ‘The first dhyana, the first dhyana,’ it is said. What now is the first dhyana?”

- 4 Then, avuso, this occurred to me:

‘Here, bhikkhu, quite secluded from sensual pleasures, secluded from unwholesome mental states, he attains and dwells in the **first dhyana**, accompanied by initial application and sustained application, accompanied by zest and happiness, *born of solitude*.⁴⁹

This is called the first dhyana.

Practice

5 Then, avuso, quite secluded from sensual pleasures, secluded from unwholesome mental states, I attained and dwelled in the **first dhyana**, accompanied by initial application and sustained application, accompanied by zest and happiness, born of solitude.

While I dwelled therein, avuso, perception and attention accompanied by *sensuality* assailed me.⁵⁰

⁴³ See Gunaratana, *The Path of Serenity and Insight*, 1985: 101-105.

⁴⁴ S 43.12/4:363.

⁴⁵ A 8.63/4:301 = SD 46.6.

⁴⁶ The suttas actually speak of three kinds of samadhi: the samadhi with both applied and sustained applications (*savitakka savicāra samādhi*), the samadhi of merely sustained application without applied application (*avitakka, -vicāra, matta samādhi*), and the samadhi with neither applied nor sustained application. Cf Vbh 275; Dhs 47; DhsA 224; Vism 127.

⁴⁷ See **Ākāsānañc’āyatana Pañha S** (S 40.5) = SD 24.15 Intro (1); also Rupert Gethin, *The Buddhist Path to Awakening*, 2001: 14 n59.

⁴⁸ *Idha mayhaṃ, āvuso, rahogatassa paṭisallīnassa evaṃ cetaso parivitakko udapādi.*

⁴⁹ *Idha bhikkhu vivicceva kāmehi vivicca akusalehi dhammehi savitakkaṃ savicāraṃ vivekajaṃ pīti, sukhaṃ paṭhamaṃ jhānaṃ upasampajja viharati.* For a fuller formula, see **Sāmañña, phala S** (D 2.77/1:73) = SD 8.10 On the omission of “one-pointedness of mind” (*cittassa ek’aggatā*) and “concentration” (*samādhi*) here, see **The layman and dhyana** = SD 8.5.

⁵⁰ *Tassa mayhaṃ, āvuso, iminā vihārena viharato kāma, saḥagatā saññā, manasikārā samudācaranti.* Comy glosses *kāma, saḥagatā* as *pañca, nīvaraṇa, saḥagatā* (accompanied by the five hindrances) (SA 3:89), ie, he was assailed by the mental hindrances (sense-desire, ill will, restlessness and remorse, sloth and torpor, and doubt).

Realization

6 Then, avuso, the Blessed One approached me by means of psychic power and said this to me:
‘Moggallāna, Moggallāna! Do not be heedless, brahmin, regarding the first dhyana:

steady the mind in the first dhyana,	<i>pathame jhāne cittaṃ saṅṭhapehi,</i>
unify the mind in the first dhyana,	<i>pathame jhāne cittaṃ ekodiṃ karohi,</i>
concentrate the mind in the first dhyana,	<i>pathame jhāne cittaṃ samādaha.’</i>

7 Then, avuso, on another occasion, quite secluded from sensual pleasures, secluded from unwholesome mental states, I attained and dwelled in the first dhyana, accompanied by initial application and sustained application, accompanied by zest and happiness, born of solitude.

Spiritual friendship

8 Now, avuso, if one speaking rightly, were to say, ‘He is a disciple who attained to greatness of direct knowledge with the help of the Teacher,’⁵¹

it is of me that one speaking rightly would say, ‘He is a disciple who attained to greatness of direct knowledge with the help of the Teacher.’”

— evaṃ —

080417; 081020; 090812

⁵¹ *Satthārānuggahito sāvako mahābhiññatāṃ patto*. Here “greatness of direct knowledge” (*mahābhiññā*) includes Moggallāna’s excellence in the psychic powers (*iddhi, vidhā*): see (**Pasāda, kampana**) **Moggallāna S** (S 51.14/5:269-271) = SD 57.2 & (**Iddhi**) **Moggallāna S** (S 51.31/5:288 f) = SD 57.3.